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ABSTRACT

Described in this paper are the conditions and problems confronting the Jefferson County School District in its desegregation efforts. Taken into consideration is the role Western Kentucky University's Desegregation Training Institute played in helping the Jefferson County System meet and deal with these conditions and problems. The major problem addressed is Jefferson County's merger with another school system at the same time it was undergoing desegregation. Particular conditions discussed include the differences in racial distribution among the two districts' student populations and faculty, a declining financial base, and a shrinking enrollment due to white flight. Plans developed by the County to desegregate the schools of the merged system with little or no busing of pupils are described. Objectives of the Training Institute Project for helping Jefferson County deal with its educational crisis are outlined. Included are strategies for facilitating open communication and for resolving conflicts. (EB)

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Louisville 1975-76
The Birth of a Desegregation Institute

During the 1975-76 academic year the University of Kentucky (UK) in conjunction with Western Kentucky University (WKU) operated a special Desegregation Training Institute in concert with the Jefferson County School System. Funds for the project were made available through the U.S. Office of Education, Title IV of the Civil Rights Act. The project was designed to support and enhance the Jefferson County School System's desegregation plan which was implemented as the school year began.

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Similar to other school districts that involuntarily or otherwise desegregated school facilities, the Jefferson County System was confronted with numerous problems. However, unlike most districts, the Jefferson County System had recently absorbed through merger the Louisville Independent District. The two acts of merger and desegregation occuring almost simultaneously tended to compound and exacerbate conditions.

To better understand the unique problems that confronted the Jefferson County School District and the significance of the services provided by the universities through this project it is important to articulate conditions that prevailed in Jefferson County before the merger and subsequent desegregation of school facilities.

Prior to April 1973, the Louisville Independent District operated as a separate and distinct entity, providing educational services to approximately 46,000 children. Blacks comprised 54% of the district while the remaining 46% of the student population was white. Faculty, administrative and other personnel reflected the ethnic composition of the school population. The district could well be characterized as one which promulgated educational innovations, experimented with a variety of programs and actively pursued government and foundation funds to support these endeavors. In addition a substantial percentage of the student population was from families of low socio-economic status, which made the district eligible to receive specially earmarked funds from the federal government. The Louisville district was second to Houston in its ability to garner federal funds to support special projects and activities in the 1972-73 school year.

In sharp contrast to the Louisville Independent District, the Jefferson County District prior to merger had a student enrollment of approximately 92,000...97% white and the remaining 3% black. The composition of the faculty and other support personnel was similar to that of the student population. The average per capita income of county residents according to 1970 census data was $12,800 suggestive of a middle class community. The school district was ineligible to receive federal funds from the Office of Education that were specifically allocated to support children of low income families. Therefore, most academic support programs operated by the district were supported through the general fund.

In addition to the busing of a large number of children the desegregation plan also called for the reassignment of teachers and administrative personnel. Teachers who had years of successful teaching experience in their respective districts were required to work in schools with students from socio-economic and racial backgrounds with which some teachers were unfamiliar.

Merger and Desegregation

Victor Hugo once said that "No armies can stop an idea whose time has come." Thus on April 1, 1975, the long and sometimes bitter struggle between the citizens and elected officials of the Louisville Independent School District and the Jefferson County Public School System passed into history. Lyman Ginger, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, acting upon directions from the State Board of Education, ordered that the two systems be merged in accordance with state statutes governing school merger. The volatile issue of

desegregation had been addressed previously many times, however, the issue was not resolved until approximately four months later when on July 17, 1975, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered District Judge James F. Gordon to desegregate the newly merged Jefferson County Public Schools. These acts ended all speculation regarding both issues,---issues that had plagued and divided city and county citizens for more than a quarter of a century. The critical task confronting school officials was to implement the highly controversial decisions while maintaining a quality education program.

Historically, merger or desegregation alone has caused serious political, social, economic, and educational problems in our nation's cities. Unlike other districts, the newly formed Jefferson County School System was directed to do both almost simultaneously. To further complicate the matter the two school boards were joined together in full strength. The five members of the former City Board joined the five members of the County Board forming a ten member board. During merger discussions, the two boards and Judge Gordon agreed to a proposal that allowed the merger board to remain separate legal entities for the purpose of submitting separate desegregation plans.[1]

Prior to merger, the city was faced with a shrinking enrollment due to "white flight" and other urban phenomena and a declining financial base, all of which contributed to a deficit school budget. On the other hand, the county had what it considered to be an exemplary system with a rapidly increasing enrollment, an expanding financial base and a majority white enrollment. County Board members clearly registered dissatisfaction with busing as the mechanism to achieve a

racial balance in the school system.[2]

It is generally felt that there was some value in allowing the two boards to develop and submit separate desegregation plans. However, it became apparent that this contributed to widespread distrust and confusion which permeated the entire community, as the two boards publicly disagreed on processes and procedures related to the implementation of a desegregation plan. In addition, the indecisive actions of the board(s) affected actions of school administrators.

For a short time it seemed as though some school administrators and teachers were caught in the middle and could not concentrate on merger problems because of the pressed concerns for desegregation and on desegregation problems because of the complexity of merger. However, as the school year evolved the commitment to the new system strengthened because it became evident that despite the civil strife and social unrest there could be no return to the past. Educationally Louisville and Jefferson County could never be the same. The dawn of a new day had finally broken.

The County's proposed desegregation plan provided for a three-step program designed to desegregate the schools of the merged system with little or no busing of pupils. This, they felt, could be done by redrawing the school attendance zones and utilizing the middle-school concept. If these two steps failed to meet the court requirements, an alternate plan known as JET (Jefferson Education Trip) was to be implemented.

Under the JET Plan pupils would attend two separate schools during the day. Enroute to the "away school" the students would receive

instruction on specially equipped buses by the accompaning teacher. Each pupil would begin and end the day at his "home" or "neighborhood" school. At the "away school" a child would be mixed with children of another race and taught physical education, music, art, social studies, science, and Spanish. After approximately four hours the child would again board his special bus for the return to the "home" or "neighborhood" school. Since all pupils would return to their "home" schools for such things as sports and club functions, all extra curricular activities and parent groups would remain intact and would not be affected by any mid-day busing efforts to achieve racial integration.

After the April 1, 1975, order to merge, the city's fear of having to desegregate within its own boundaries which they felt would encourage "white flight" from the city schools was no longer an issue. However, city education officials were concerned and had some serious doubts about the county's proposed JET Plan. City school officials felt that the plan did not achieve the "effective destruction of all racial identification in all schools in Jefferson County."[5] They felt that each school should share in the burden of desegregation by having a student population that would be roughly 80 percent white and 20 percent black. It was believed that the JET plan would increase the range to 50 percent black in some schools, 15 percent above the so called tipping point.

The city's position was indeed obvious when an official writing the city's reaction to the JET plan wrote: "We can forthrightly adopt a responsible desegregation plan--one in which everyone is equally affected--or we can attempt to maintain the status quo by placing the

burden of a plan on minority children. JET suggests that a small portion of our community, primarily the black community, bear the brunt of desegregation while the white community enjoys the luxury of escaping the burden....."[6]

The desegregation plan that was endorsed by Judge Gordon considered stability, equity, predictability and simplicity as the four basic factors essential to meeting the mandate of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court.

In order to establish the racial percentage in all schools, a system of pupil selection that would satisfy the four factors above were:

(1) All elementary schools in the Jefferson County School System will have a black student population of no less than 12% and no more than 40%.

(2) All secondary schools within the Jefferson County System will have a black student population of no less than 12 1/2% and no more than 40%.

(3) The method of selecting students to be transported for the purpose of desegregation insures that every student within racial catagories, participates as equally as possible. The only exception to this rule occurs when a student attends a school that this court has determined is already at this time sufficiently desegregated within the guidelines set above so that transportation is not required.[7]

Judge Gordon's plan called for the drawing of new boundary lines for school attendance areas to insure the maximum desegregation of the schools without the use of any other remedy, including transportation. In creating the new attendance areas, the court observed that a number of schools in the Jefferson County School System, because of declining enrollment, were presently under-utilized, having too few students enrolled to justify their continued use. The court

felt that closing twelve schools, eleven elementary and one junior high would affect a substantial dollar saving without impairing the capability of school authorities to comfortably house the student body.[8]

After the court established the new boundary lines throughout the county it was discovered that 13 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 6 junior high schools and 6 high schools had a black student population that met Judge Gordon's 12 to 40% in elementary schools and 12 1/2 to 35% in high schools. Thus, these schools were considered desegregated and exempt from busing.

After creating the new school attendance areas by the use of redistricting and fixing minimum requirements for student racial ratios, the court determined that those remedies by themselves did not meet the constitutional requirements as interpreted by the courts to dismantle the existing dual school system. Therefore, an additional remedy approved by the court for adoption in Jefferson County called for the clustering and pairing of schools. This second part of the desegregation plan clustered and paired black schools with white schools and required the Jefferson County Board of Education to transport students between these schools to achieve appropriate desegregation of the school system.[9]

Student assignment incorporated in the desegregation plan saw first and twelfth grade students remaining at their district school in the attendance area in which they lived for the entire year. However, the first grades were to participate in a class exchange program. The pupils would be transported as a class accompanied by their teachers rather than as individuals. All students except

those who had educational problems such as physical or mental handicaps, etc., and students attending unique educational facilities or programs would be bused.

The order also stipulated that the school personnel such as principals, assistant principals, counselors, and teachers working directly with students would be assigned so that the ratio of whites to blacks within these categories in all schools would be roughly equivalent to the black-white staff composition of the school system as a whole.

Meeting the Challenge

Recognizing the tremendous educational crisis facing the newly organized Jefferson County School System, the University of Kentucky and Western Kentucky University were asked to collaborate in the development of a service delivery program capable of responding to the unique training needs of the district's professional staff. The conceptual framework of the program emphasized the training of administrative personnel who were in a position to influence and impact change.

In a joint proposal, the University of Kentucky and Western Kentucky University received funds to provide an intensive six week workshop during the summer and ten months of additional training for five target groups. These groups were:

1. The Board of Education -- 10 members
2. The Executive Management Staff -- the Superintendent and three (3) Deputy Superintendents
3. The Program Management Staff -- 35 Associate and Assistant Superintendents
4. Task Force Training Groups from the Technical Management Staff which would function as Training Teams for 22 junior high and middle schools

In the request for University assistance, a number of specific needs were identified. University personnel recognized that there was no way that a single training institute could solve all of the problems related to the merger and desegregation of Jefferson County Schools. Realistically, the most that could be hoped for was to develop a limited set of objectives and design a plan of action to alleviate some of the more critical needs.

The specific objectives for the project were organized into "missions" directed at each target group. These missions were to:

School Board Members

1. Provide assistance to members of the Board of Education to enable them to identify the needs and solve policy problems arising from merger and desegregation.

2. Provide assistance to board members in developing an awareness of common beliefs and a sound basis for cooperation.

3. Assist board members in developing an awareness of differences in the district as a result of differing philosophies of education and socio-cloromic and cultural backgrounds.

4. Assist board members in formulating a unified team approach to addressing problems.

5. Assist board members in developing strategies for resolving conflicts which arise and the ability to make rational decisions under pressure.

Management Personnel

Executive Program and Technical

1. Assist management personnel to identify needs and in the resolution of administrative problems arising from desegregation and merger.

2. Assist management in advising the Board of Education on needed policy changes resulting from desegregation and merger.

3. Assist management in providing leadership to the Professional Staff in implementing needed program changes and procedures resulting form desegregation and merger.

4. Assist management in developing new administrative structures to accommodate changes caused by desegregation.

5. Assist management in resolving conflict within the organization.

Task Force Team

1. Train six Task Force training groups to work with junior high and middle school building leadership teams on the development of:

   a. Communication skills
   b. Group process strategies
   c. Multiculture awareness
   d. Sex discrimination
   e. Problem solving skills
   f. Conflict management skills

2. Equip Task Force training groups with training skills, strategies, and materials to provide desegregation training for leadership trainees in 36 junior high and middle schools.

3. Provide follow-up supervision and training to six Task Force training groups as the training groups provide desegregation training for their target groups.

4. Identify resources and develop training plans.

As a strategy to work with the Board of Education and the Executive Management Staff, a University Consultant Team (UCT) comprised of representatives from the University of Kentucky; Western Kentucky University; the University of Louisville; and the Educational Opportunity Planning Center at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville was formed. The task of the UCT was to work with the Board and the Executive Management by attending regularly scheduled board meetings to identify the board's concerns and assist in a helping role throughout the summer institute and the follow-up period. This process emphasized mechanisms designed to facilitate open communication, the development of a team approach to solving policy problems related to merger and desegregation, and to assist in developing strategies for resolving conflict.

The second, third and fourth phases of the Desegregation Institute, including the Executive, Program and Technical Management personnel from the Central Office, initiated their institute training in August with an intensive weekend workshop with on-going training continuing on a monthly basis for each of the three (3) units after the summer instutute from September through June, 1976. Process training activities for the management personnel focused on team building, multi-cultural awareness, open communication practices and strategies for conflict management and decision making. In addition to the regular training sessions, the UCT worked closely with the Executive Management Staff on a regular basis providing technical assistance in areas of need.

The final phase of the institute, the six Task Force teams, began their training in August. Each team, composed of five persons each, experienced four weeks of intensive task oriented training. These Task Force training groups developed the capability to provide desegregation training and assistance to the staff of 22 separate junior high and middle schools. Under supervision of a bi-racial team of university facilitators, the six Task Force training groups focused on the development of communication skills, multiculture awareness activities, the development of team cohesiveness, problem solving strategies, conflict management strategies and training skills. Beginning in September, the six training teams began work in three or four junior high or middle schools in training for desegregation. Follow-up training activities concentrated on instructional strategies to assist teachers to deal with diverse population on a monthly basis.

With the above strategies and objectives in mind, the Desegregation Institute initiated its program to facilitate a smooth transition between two distinctly different school systems and to assist management personnel in identifying needs and solving administrative problems arising from desegregation. It was apparent at the time, that certain elements in the community would voice strong objections to any type of desegregation plan. However, no one had expected the outbreaks of violence that were to occur.

In retrospect it would be difficult to ascertain how community violence could have been avoided. Nor can a determination be made regarding the effect the violence had on administrators who were charged with the responsibility of running the school system. However, two dimensions became apparent: no political or civil leaders emerged to assume a role of moral leadership in the community; and the Board of Education did not present a unified image to the community. It was in such a climate that the University of Kentucky's new born Desegregation Training Institute took its first step.

Footnotes

[1]The Louisville Times, March 21, 1975.

[2]The Louisville Times, May 9, 1975.

[3]The Courier Journal, April 2, 1975.

[4]The Louisville Times, Aprill 22, 1975.

[5]The Couier Journal, April 13, 1975

[6]Ibid.

[7]The U.S. District Court, Western District of Kentucky at Louisville; Newburg Area Council U.S. Board of Education of Jefferson County.

[8]Newburg Area Council, Inc., et. al. V Board of Education Jefferson County et. al. Civil Action Nos. 7045 and 7291. pp. 2-3.

[9]Ibid, pp. 4-5